(U) Using an Intelligence Analysis Technique -- On Ourselves

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(U//FOUO) NSAers use a methodology usually trained against our targets (i.e. Social Network Analysis) for a different purpose: to aid in "knowledge transfer" within the NSA work force.

(U//FOUO) NSA increasingly is focusing its attention on a looming crisis: the tremendous loss of expertise that will go out the door when thousands of "baby boomer" employees step into retirement. If you look at the current demographics of the NSA work force, you will see two peaks: the 40-and-older group (aka the "big red blob") and the young generation, recently out of college in many cases. The age group between the two is largely missing, a reflection of low hiring in the late 1980's and the 1990's. Agency leaders recognize that the need to transfer knowledge from one generation to the other is of prime importance.

(U//FOUO) How best to do it? In a pilot program, the Agency's Knowledge Transfer Program (KTP) turned a methodology usually used to gather intelligence - Social Network Analysis - upon NSA itself. SNA is based on the idea that the best way to find certain types of knowledge is to target those key individuals to whom people turn when they don't know how to proceed. (See a related article .)

(U//FOUO) In this case, KTP wanted to find the NSA employees who acted as a major source of information and expertise for the rest of the work force - the "go-to" people - and their potential successors. This would prove that SNA, used to identify vulnerabilities and tear down our target networks (such as al-Qa'ida) could be used for a more benign purpose: to understand our own work force better and to build up our knowledge sharing networks within it. The pilot also showed how to measure the robustness of the network and identify weak links that need strengthening.

(U//FOUO) The pilot SNA was conducted on the Data-Flow Manager (DFM) population, the "Traffic Fairies" that seem to miraculously deliver data to analysts' desks while they sleep. This population was chosen because senior SID Technical Directors said they feared losing this critical knowledge set over any other, although they couldn't precisely describe what their knowledge content was.

(U//FOUO) The pilot not only defined the content of this DFM Key Knowledge Set, it also exposed the DFM network of performance. It identified some DFMs as "Key Human Capital Assets," whose knowledge must be retained. It quantified "anecdotal" evidence and provided metrics. It also identified specific areas where DFM knowledge was at risk and suggested how to plan for DFM succession. Additionally, it exposed the crying need for ADHR and ADET to re-create the DFM work role, and suggested how to hire, retain, develop, and recognize the DFM population. More time-critically, it points to one particularly key individual, about to retire, for whom we should be creating a tailored retention opportunity now.

(U//FOUO) The study was conducted in-house and resourced only with employees' time and a borrowed software license for the SNA tool, UCINet. A SNA of the entire NSA population for the purposes of Knowledge Transfer would help us learn how to more effectively manage our knowledge-sharing networks.